

when they pick up the Constitution, to see that notion—that women and men are persons of equal stature—as a basic principle of our society.

To this day, the Constitution of the United States, our Nation's key document and supreme law, does not consider men and women of equal stature. For example, the Constitution does not protect equal pay under the law. Women, especially women of color, are earning significantly less than their male counterparts for the same work. Women make up a majority of the population, yet are underrepresented in our government institutions and the business world.

The ERA has reached the necessary 38-State ratification threshold for this landmark legislation to be added to the Constitution of the United States. The ERA would solidify and protect the rights of women where our legislation currently falls short. The ERA would raise the standard of scrutiny with which the courts analyze cases of discrimination on the basis of sex and send the vital message that women and men are citizens of equal stature in the United States.

I have introduced bipartisan legislation in the Senate, S.J. Res. 1, with the senior Senator from Alaska, Ms. MURKOWSKI, that would remove the existing deadline and allow us to bring this meaningful legislation to the finish line once and for all.

CRIS ALLEN MULTIEMPLOYER PENSION RECAPITALIZATION AND REFORM PLAN

Mr. GRASSLEY. Mr. President, the multiemployer pension system has been in need of a major overhaul for years. More than 300 plans are critically underfunded. Moreover, the Pension Benefit Guaranty Corporation, PBGC, multiemployer insurance fund, which is a backstop for these plans, is projected to become insolvent in the next 5 years.

If this occurs, 1.5 million retirees, due to no fault of their own, could see their hard-earned retirement benefits slashed to pennies on the dollar. This is unacceptable, and it is one of the reasons that, when I took over as chairman of the Senate Finance Committee in 2019, I made it a priority to fix the failing multiemployer pension system. To me, this has always meant helping secure the retirement benefits of millions of retirees and ensuring that this retirement system is sustainable over the long term. Working with former Senator and HELP Committee Chairman Lamar Alexander, I immediately got to work on a draft proposal, which was released for public input and stakeholder feedback in November of 2019. We received numerous comments from workers, retirees, unions, employers, actuaries, academics, plan officials, and members of the general public that helped me refine my approach and create a balanced plan.

Yesterday, I reintroduced this version of my plan, which is titled the

“Chris Allen Multiemployer Pension Recapitalization and Reform Act.” This legislation recognizes that, given the severity of the underfunding issue, some Federal dollars will be necessary to shore up severely troubled plans in the short term. But, this limited assistance must be coupled with structural reforms intended to address the root causes of our current situation. This includes reforms to multiemployer funding rules to ensure plans are adequately capitalized to make good on promises made to plan participants. Furthermore, it would increase PBGC oversight of troubled plans and enhance transparency for plan participants. Critically, it also overhauls the financing of the PBGC multiemployer insurance fund so that it can resume its role as the insurer of last resort for these plans without additional taxpayer funding.

The fundamental tenet of my plan is that all stakeholders have a role in fixing the multiemployer pension system. The American taxpayer shouldn't be expected to simply write a blank check. Stakeholders need to have skin in the game if the system is to be sustainable moving forward.

I understand that this is an extremely complex situation. There is no perfect solution. From the start, I have let it be known I want to work with my Democratic colleagues to find a bipartisan compromise. In June of last year, I came to the floor to plead with my Democratic colleagues to come to the table in hopes we could work toward a bipartisan agreement prior to the end of last Congress. Unfortunately, for months I heard nothing. Then, with only a few weeks left in the 116th Congress, my Democratic colleagues took me up on my offer and negotiations began in earnest. Several weeks of bipartisan negotiations ensued, but there simply was not enough time to iron out all our differences to ensure we had sufficient Member support before the end of the year. However, I found our discussions constructive. They were focused correctly on securing the retirement benefits of participants in the failing plans in the near term, while also ensuring the long-term sustainability of the multiemployer pension system without a Federal takeover.

I hoped our negotiations would provide a foundation for continuing to work toward a bipartisan solution this Congress. Instead I am disappointed to see that the majority has include an unprecedented \$86 billion no-strings bailout of troubled multiemployer pension plans in the reconciliation bill currently before the Senate.

As I have discussed, I recognize that Federal funds will be needed to solve the pension crisis in the short term, but it is equally as important that essential reforms are enacted to ensure the system can be self-sustaining in the long term. Otherwise, taxpayers will be perpetually subsidizing a private sector system of employee-benefit promises. That is exactly what will

occur if my Democratic colleagues insist on going forward with the reform-free bailout included in this package. As is, this proposal has been stripped of even the most rudimentary of reforms or accountability measures. In fact, one provision even bars the PBGC from issuing regulations to provide for such measures. As a result, the proposal is likely to breed what economists call “moral hazard” as plan managers and sponsors realize that there are no consequences to underfunding and overpromising. In the end, the American taxpayer will be left footing the bill for a private sector retirement system.

I hope my Democratic colleagues will reconsider moving forward with their no-holds-bared bailout. Fundamentally, it does not belong in the current package. The issues plaguing the multiemployer system long predate the pandemic and are not COVID related. But if it is to be included, at a minimum, essential reforms along the lines of what I have proposed must be included. They are essential to protect the American taxpayer and to ensure the long-term sustainability of the multiemployer system.

Toward this end, I intend to offer a motion to commit the reconciliation bill to the Finance Committee with instructions to report it back with critical reforms to ensure multiemployer plans are adequately funded and the PBGC's insurance fund is adequately financed. Without such reforms, the current proposal would set the precedent that the American taxpayer, not the PBGC, is the ultimate guarantor of private-employer pension promises. If this is the case, the burden on the American taxpayer will not be the \$86 billion in this package or even hundreds of billions of dollars. It will be limitless.

TRIBUTE TO CHIEF JUDGE SIDNEY R. THOMAS

Mr. BLUMENTHAL. Mr. President, today I recognize Chief Judge Sidney R. Thomas, a dedicated public servant who is celebrating 25 years on the Federal bench on March 11.

Born and raised in Montana, Judge Thomas's skill as a decisionmaker was evident from the start. Even as a high school debater, he earned the respect of competing schools with the combination of his success at meets and affable spirit. Both his tenacity and good nature would be enduring legacies. Judge Thomas went on to attend Montana State University and obtain his J.D. from the University of Montana School of Law. He was twice appointed to the Board of Regents of Higher Education as a student member.

After graduating, Judge Thomas entered private practice. A quick learner with a deft ability to understand even the most complex cases, he became a senior partner. During his tenure in private practice, Judge Thomas specialized in commercial litigation, along with bankruptcy, government, and media law. He further applied his expertise as the standing bankruptcy

trustee for all bankruptcy cases filed in the U.S. District Court for the District of Montana's Billings Division. Judge Thomas also helped shape future lawyers by serving at Rocky Mountain College for over a decade as an adjunct instructor in law.

On July 19, 1995, recognizing Judge Thomas's outstanding record, President Bill Clinton nominated him to the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit. The U.S. Senate confirmed Judge Thomas in January 1996, and he served as a judge for nearly two decades, before becoming chief judge on December 1, 2014.

Throughout his impressive career, Judge Thomas has earned the confidence of his colleagues and the American people. He is a respected leader who is trusted for his sound judgment and integrity, as well as beloved for his warm personality and wit. These qualities landed Judge Thomas on President Barack Obama's short list of candidates to replace Justice John Paul Stevens on the U.S. Supreme Court in 2010.

Thanks to his extraordinary commitment public service, his intelligence and legal acumen, and his commitment to justice, Judge Thomas is a credit to our Nation's judiciary. His fairness on the bench, along with his tireless work ethic and compassion, sets a model for all of us.

I applaud his many accomplishments and hope my colleagues will join me in congratulating Chief Judge Sidney R. Thomas on attaining 25 years on the Federal bench.

ADDITIONAL STATEMENTS

VERMONT STATE OF THE UNION ESSAY CONTEST FINALISTS

• Mr. SANDERS. Mr. President, I ask to have printed in the RECORD some of the finalists' essays written by Vermont high school students as part of the 11th annual "State of the Union" essay contest conducted by my office. The material follows:

FINALISTS

ALEXANDER SHRIVER, BRATTLEBORO UNION HIGH SCHOOL, SENIOR

On November 8th, 2016, the American people exercised their most basic democratic freedom and decided to elect Hillary Clinton as their President. According to CNN Politics, Clinton won the majority of the 138 million votes cast. If U.S. democracy stayed true to its ideal of equality, Clinton would have been elected. Instead, the 2.9 million votes which gave Clinton the edge meant nothing—those voices unheard and disrespected. Donald Trump was placed in office.

Writing the Constitution, the founding fathers struggled to find a fair way to elect a President and ultimately created the Electoral College. Instead of relying on a popular vote, this system, along with the infamous Three-fifths Compromise, was built to appease the opposition of southern slaveholders worried the more populous North would control the country and outlaw slavery. Since its inception, it has contradicted the peoples' decision in five elections, including 2016.

As horrible as its origins are, some argue that the Electoral College still protects the interests of smaller states where people might not otherwise be heard. They argue the antiquated system forces candidates to campaign in less populous areas, protecting their importance. However, the Electoral College does not fulfill this purpose. Consider the areas Donald Trump visited in his 2020 campaign: he never traveled to states like Vermont, Wyoming, North Dakota, Rhode Island, or Montana. This is the kind of disproportionate attention the Electoral College is supposed to prevent, but because of their low vote count and poll's suggesting a large polarization towards one candidate, these states were not prioritized.

330 million people live in the U.S., almost none of whom have had any sort of interaction with a presidential candidate. Most citizens learn about presidential campaigns through the media, online campaigning, and events like nationally televised debates. Therefore, even if the Electoral College did force equal attention to every state, it makes no difference because of the manner in which citizens make their voting decisions.

In the Electoral College, some votes count for more than others. Each state has two voting delegates from the Senate and at least one member in the House of Representatives regardless of their population, automatically giving smaller states more voting power. According to the University of North Carolina, a vote in Alaska is about 2.42 times more valuable than the average vote, while a Californian vote is only 87% as valuable as the average. Furthermore, in states where the vast majority of people vote the same way, each individual vote is less important than in a more politically diverse state. Because its original purpose of protecting small states is unnecessary, the Electoral College only serves to devalue some votes.

The best solution to promote a more pure democracy is to amend the Constitution to replace the Electoral College with a popular vote. The only factor in determining the President would be the will of the people. There are many ways the American democracy needs to improve, so let's start with its most fundamental institution.

STEPHIE SKI, WINOOSKI HIGH SCHOOL, SENIOR
ANTIRACISM

"To be black and conscious of anti black racism is to stare into the mirror of your own extinctions" by Ibram X. Kendi. The assassination of George Floyd showed me that my life could also be taken away at the knees of a police officer. As a black woman, it felt as if I had a danger in my chest, that I couldn't pull out, I could only watch it bleed for nine and a half minutes. Despite the horrendous police brutality, I believe that our generation has the power to remove racist thoughts, beliefs, and actions in this world. The only way to remove racism is to become an antiracist.

My definition of antiracist is someone that actively chooses to be against racism. It takes learning about structural racism and one's own implicit bias and privilege. According to PNAS, Between the ages of 25 and 29, black men are killed by police at a rate between 2.8 and 4.1 per 100,000. Stephan Clark, a young man that was standing in his grandmother's yard, holding a mobile phone. The police shot him 20 times, they assumed Clark was holding a weapon because his skin is seen as a weapon. This type of scenario is not the first nor is it the last unless we change it as a country. Based on the National Equity Project, Structural racialization refers to institutional practices and structural arrangements that lead to racialized inequities Equity is when every

individual or group of people receives the right amount of support based on their needs. We need to work on providing racial equity in our country.

Since the minority communities have been built to be inferior to be majority communities, it is hard to survive in a crisis. We have to understand the 400 years of nightmares black people have lived through because it impacts our lives. Based on The Washington Post, black Americans were 37% more likely to die from Covid19 than whites. As a black woman, this statistic scares me because it is implying that my race will be the reason I am more likely to die from Covid19 and not my health. As a member of The Winooski Students for Anti Racism, we are demanding that SRO officers be removed from our school because of the institutional racism the police system was built on. Two thousand twenty was the last march to demand BLACK LIVES MATTER, my life matters.

We have to mandate Culture and Community class for middle and high school. That class will focus on teaching students about race, racism, identity, equity, biases, privilege, and slavery. We need social workers accompanying police officers to a situation believed to be racially motivated. We also need to support anti racist organizations in the U.S.A. Encourage states to at least have one organization that prioritizes anti racism. In order to save the world from this racist pandemic, we have focused on targeting racism.●

MESSAGES FROM THE PRESIDENT

Messages from the President of the United States were communicated to the Senate by Ms. Roberts, one of his secretaries.

EXECUTIVE MESSAGES REFERRED

As in executive session the Presiding Office laid before the Senate messages from the President of the United States submitting sundry nominations which were referred to the Committee on Armed Services.

(The messages received today are printed at the end of the Senate proceedings.)

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS AND JOINT RESOLUTIONS

The following bills and joint resolutions were introduced, read the first and second times by unanimous consent, and referred as indicated:

By Mr. PORTMAN (for himself, Ms. WARREN, Mr. DURBIN, and Mr. VAN HOLLEN):

S. 612. A bill to require the Under Secretary for Health of the Department of Veterans Affairs to provide certain information to medical center staff and homelessness service providers of the Department regarding the coordinated entry processes for housing and services operated under the Continuum of Care Program of the Department of Housing and Urban Development, and for other purposes; to the Committee on Veterans' Affairs.

By Mr. TILLIS (for himself, Ms. SINEMA, Mr. CRAMER, and Mrs. FEINSTEIN):

S. 613. A bill to direct the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to carry out a pilot program on dog training therapy and to amend title 38, United States Code, to authorize the Secretary to provide service dogs to veterans